

A celebration of life
David Lawrence Knight

12 July 1955 – 24 August 2019

3.30pm – 4.30pm, 16 September 2019, City of London Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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David Knight was born on 12 July 1955. As a boy he was known as 'Dod', but I shall call him Dave. Today we remember him for the impact he has had on individuals and the wider community, his lust for life, his dynamism, his sense of fun, and his enthusiasm for people, causes and, of course, his dogs.

It's fair to say that Dave's life was divided into three broad sections, his love for his trade union work, his love of football, and his love of running. Along with his professional life as a social worker, they shared a common thread – a real sense of community and a desire to help all its members, particularly those who had no voice, or who were in danger of being left behind by society.

He is remembered with gratitude by many of the people he has helped over the years, including some, now in their forties, who were at Snakes Lane children's home. The impact of his trade union work is immeasurable. It is a lasting legacy of which his family can be very proud, and you will hear more about this later.

Dave was introduced to Leyton Orient by his father, even though he was a Chelsea supporter. It was the local team, and Dave stayed loyal through thick and thin. Of course he did a great deal more than that – as you will hear from fellow fan, Tom Davies.

Dave got into running when he stopped playing football for the *Orientear* team – he was a very fit man, right until his final diagnosis. After his social runs on a Sunday morning, he'd come back for his dinner before he and Juno crashed out on the sofa with the football on the telly, and all was quiet in the house. Frank Brownlie will speak about him as a fellow runner.

All his passions were firmly underpinned by Dave's love for his family. He and his brother John had been the number one priority for their parents, and both sons acknowledged and appreciated that. They had a very happy family life growing up in Leyton. Their mother, Dora, was a nurse and their father Dave, a trade union rep and post office engineer. The example Dora and Dave set – in both cases working to improve the lives of other people – was to be of enduring value, and Dave was, as you know, to follow very much in his father's footsteps.

Their father worked an early shift, which meant he was free to take the boys out in the afternoons after school, and John remembers seemingly endless summer days playing on Hackney Marshes where they would set up a mini tennis court. That warmth, that centrality provided by their parents was key to John and Dave's future lives and those of their own families.

Dave was a man of integrity. He had moral standards of his own, but he didn't foist them on others. When he spoke to people, he engaged with them fully, and this in turn drew them in. He understood the importance of making the most of our one life – his mantra was 'Do what we can while we can.'

Anne, Joe and Ellie were all very precious to him, as he was to them. They understood the importance of what he did outside the home. They accepted that at times those activities took priority over them, but they also knew that his love for them was honest, profound and robust. Joe remembers seeing his dad in 'fight-mode' – it was usually because he was wearing a suit – and he knew at the end of the day to give him time to decompress with Anne, put on some of his favourite music and get into family mode again. The relationship between Anne and Dave was immensely strong and resilient. It was a true partnership – from start to finish. Even back in the eighties, both parents shared parenting responsibilities equally. They both worked outside and inside the home, and Dave was no more a stranger to nappy changing and getting up in the night to quieten small babies than was Anne – and he even toned down the music he was playing for them so as not to wake her up!

They had met when Anne was still in sixth form, and Dave was there to help her celebrate her exam results. Celebrations were a particular joy for Dave – Christmas and birthdays of course, Bonfire Night and Halloween – any anniversary was an excuse as far as he was concerned. Indeed he'd make sure he had the day off from work on special occasions so he could plan the festivities. There was a certain routine to these events, which he liked, with flowers for Anne every year for birthdays and Mother's Day. For his last birthday the house was filled with balloons; glow

sticks adorned the dog's collar, there were candles, poppers and a birthday banner – everything was done properly.

He took great pleasure in the achievements of people he cherished. His children talk movingly of the influence their father had on them and the relationship they held. So often it is small things that they remember, as when Joe out of the blue identified a lapwing by its distinctive flight. Dave had taught him that. His friends were impressed. Ellie remembers a project at school to see which team could come up with the best fundraising idea. He was with her all the way, and immensely proud when he went to the talent show her team had put on as part of their project.

The way Dave treated his illness was a mark of the man. He was not in denial but 'he never disappeared into it'. When people came to chat, he was interested in what they were doing, not talking about himself. He never shied away from anything. His medical notes were so beautifully ordered that even medical staff came to take copies. Not long before he died, he had started taking prints of digital photos to put into albums and tidying up his substantial, perfectly ordered, music collection – music was another of his passions. As he did so, he realised he had some duplicates, one of which, a Dr Feelgood album, he offered to John. But as he also handed over his only copy of the DVD of *Oil City Confidential*, he made it very clear he wanted it back!

Dave was always looking to the future, always looking outside himself – surveying the world around him and the people within it, and thinking, 'What can I do to make things better?'

Tribute from Tom Davies (Leyton Orient)

So, the reason I knew Dave was that we watched Leyton Orient together. But that barely scratches the surface. With Dave you were never just a spectator. You were involved. Dave was involved in Leyton Orient, part of it. He tried to make it better, brought his values to it, saw it as a community thing.

I first got to know him when I was a teenager, through the *Orienteer*, the fanzine he set up in 1986 and which is still going strong today. And for me it was an absolute eye-opener, something that made me think more deeply about the club and about football and ask questions: why shouldn't fans have more of a say in the game? Why shouldn't our voices be heard? Why should we tolerate racism – and he was particularly courageous about that in the early days.

In recent years, his involvement in the Leyton Orient Fans' Trust and the fight to save the club from ruin three seasons ago was hugely valuable. He brought all his campaigning experience and wisdom to bear on that, leading marches and speaking passionately at meetings, and I'm just glad he got to see the club saved, turned around and promoted back to the Football League as champions this year. But Dave saw football as a social thing, and he cultivated a wonderful social scene around the magazine, which still thrives today. The number of people I know, the number of friends I've made, directly or indirectly, through Dave probably runs into three figures.

And watching Orient with Dave was such fun. An away trip with him wouldn't just be a trip to the football. You'd get a musical mystery tour if you were in his car as he whirled us through his hugely varied, and mostly excellent, music taste; an away trip with him would be a mystery tour in other ways too – his wayward sense of direction was legendary, and you'd never be wholly sure whether you were going the right way round the M25 or on the right side of the Pennines. You'd get a good few drinks, a possible meet - or in our younger days, a football match with - opposing fans. Even if we'd been thrashed, were cold and tired and a long way from home, the sense of enjoyment was always there. One of my fondest memories of Dave was back in the 90s, during one of our trips to Glasgow, when we had to stop the minibus and pull over to the side of the road because everyone was laughing so much. I can't even remember what the gag was, but Dave's infectious laughter was at the centre of it. And that's the thing. Though he was serious about the things that matter, he didn't take himself too seriously, wasn't pompous or egotistical.

Though football is primarily the reason I knew him, he threw himself into all his interests so they overlapped. I went on demos with Dave, went to gigs and clubs with

him, ran a marathon with him. And he brought all of himself to each of his interests; the passion for social justice that he brought to his trade union campaigning was applied to how he watched Orient,. In turn, his campaigning tenacity was reflected in the stamina and dedication he showed as a serial marathon runner.

I'm not embarrassed to say he was a bit of a role model. A compassionate friend in bad times, a solid one in times of struggle (politically and in our trivial obsession at Brisbane Road), and great convivial company at times of celebration. He must have come to more of mine and my family's birthday dos than practically anyone else. He was also one of the first friends to pop round when our kids were born.

It's already been hard wandering into the supporters' club after a game or a pub near an away ground and Dave not being there, but his spirit lives on, not least in the kind of friendly club that Leyton Orient is. It's not exaggerating to say he's partly responsible for that. His legacy is all around us, in the many stories we'll continue to tell about him, and in his strong sense of principle and his unfailing good humour.

Tribute from Frank Brownlie (East London Runners)

Dave had many passions in life. We were lucky that one of these was running. We were even luckier when he chose to join East London Runners over 20 years ago. He quickly fitted in and began competing for the Club in the Sunday Cross Country League. He introduced many new runners to our Club and helped and took great interest in everyone. He often organised the Sunday Social runs, being a great believer in encouraging all abilities to take part. Almost always he was accompanied by his dog Juno and before that Jelly.

On many Sunday mornings the group would meet at The Lakeside Diner on Whipps Cross road, a few minutes' drive from Dave's house. Invariably he was the last to arrive, always wearing an Orient top. It was difficult to ascertain who was most excited to be out running 10 miles or more in Epping Forest, Dave or Juno. We had the great privilege of training for many spring marathons with Dave and his dogs. Dave completed 14 London Marathons and a Brighton Marathon, raising money for many Charities.

We would often run up to 18/23 miles to Hyde Park via the canal towpaths. After tea and cakes we would return by tube with Dave carrying Juno down the escalators. I recall the first occasion when he admitted to me that Juno had never been on the tube before. Needless to say other than a few whines Juno was fine and as always had a great number of admirers on board.

About two years ago we had finished our 10-mile run in Hainault Forest, stopping at the park Café for the inevitable tea and bacon and egg roll. Afterwards, setting off to jog the last mile back to our cars, we were about 100 yards down the path when Dave suddenly realised that he had left Juno behind, tied to the picnic table. She was quickly retrieved.

He was delighted to be honoured as a Life Member of ELR at the Annual General Meeting this year.

Dave always had time for others, enjoyed a pint or two on our many social functions and we shall miss him greatly.

Dod's Tribute – Anne Knight

Thanks to everyone who has joined us today to share their memories of my husband, David Knight, who was always Dod to me. We met when I was 17 and he was 20, too close to his schooldays to have shed his nickname, and it persists to this day with all the many friends he still has from those times. He took me out to celebrate on the day I got my A level results and has stood beside me and shared every significant and special life event with me ever since. We celebrated our 41st wedding anniversary this year and through the good times and the tough ones we were a team, taking strength from each other and sharing the fun. I will miss that so much. He was always optimistic about life, believed in fairness, equality of opportunity, and the power of communities and individuals to make a difference. He was always prepared to get stuck in and work to support the people and causes that mattered to him – but never took himself too seriously and always loved a laugh. In fact, he loved so many things throughout his life that brought him fun and friendship.

Friends have shared their memories of his lifetime loyalty to Leyton Orient and all the pleasure (as well as pain) it brought him. Their success in gaining promotion this year seemed like a special gift during some dark times. His running companions too have shared many special times, his marathon successes, bluebell runs and dog friendly Sunday outings. He was so proud of receiving his East London Runners life-time membership award this year. He made sure that his certificate was mounted on the wall straight away.

Dod had a lifetime love for all kinds of popular (and not so popular) music and always kept an open ear for new developments. We saw so many great bands together. He had a fully eclectic taste, loving rock and hip-hop, punk and grunge, electronic and new wave, with a fondness, too, for the weird and wonderful. One of my last memories of him was laughing as he watched a video of Tom Waits shouting in a bathtub and he never gave up on the Fall. He loved it when our children brought him new bands to try. They were never told to 'turn it down', he always played his music louder than anyone else in the house. His massive and fully catalogued record collection bears witness to his tastes. He never gave up on going to gigs, even when his mobility became a challenge, thanks to the support of the friends that looked out for him.

He loved his job. He trained as a social worker, specialising in working with children and families, first in children's homes and later as part of an area team. Never afraid of a strong argument in a just cause, he took an active role in his trade union, becoming a NALGO shop steward and, later, the Branch secretary of Unison in Waltham Forest where he supported individual members and led collective campaigns to protect workers' rights. He supported national campaigns and local causes and would always make sure his branch banner played a part in the proceedings. We had a cellar-load of banners and it was a sad day when they were passed on to new custodians. We are so grateful to his Unison branch for letting us loan theirs one last time.

Although he loved his job, he also loved his retirement. He marked his daily countdown to the big day on-line and never tired of showing off his travel card. It was not a time for slowing down, just a chance to do more of the things he chose. He

tried out walking football and immediately became addicted and encouraged everyone to have a go. He heard about the Walks for Health running in Leyton and thought he could team a dog walk with doing something useful for the community, so he joined in and trained to help lead local walks. With his friends from local unions he helped to set up Waltham Forest 'Stand Up for Your Rights', an organisation which supports and gives a voice to local residents experiencing difficulty with Universal Credit. We made time for fun too, planning our weekly Adventure Time, with trips to museums and galleries, gigs and plays, and some great days out exploring London, working our way through a book he got as a retirement gift. He always liked to have a special event to look forward to and his illness never stopped him planning ahead. We have tickets for concerts, plays and sporting events that take us into 2020 because he said 'you never know...' He never gave up on life and always wanted to live it to the full.

Perhaps Dad's greatest talent was in making and keeping good friends in all areas of his life, our school friends, his social work and Unison colleagues, the young people he worked with, running companions and union comrades, CHAOS campers, walking footballers and, of course, Leyton Orient fans, who he bumped into wherever we went. I was taken aback when taking over some of his dog walking responsibilities – I found that our dog seemed to have a wider social circle than I did. So many people that I did not know stopped us to say 'Hi, Juno, where's Dave today?' Of course he was an active participant in Leytonstone's dog-walking community. I just hadn't realised. When he became ill, he was deeply moved by all the kind and supportive messages so many people sent him, the visits you paid him that brought him such pleasure and all the efforts his friends made to see he never missed an Orient home game. And for the friendship of John and Sally, our partners in crime since the beginning, for our Southwold weekends, shared outings, including a special trip to Runnymede, your weekly visits and unfailing support for us both, we can't thank you enough.

Most of all, Dad loved our children, Joe and Ellie, our home and our family. He loved being a dad and there are too many memories to do him justice today, riotous bathtimes, epic bedtime story sessions, always with character voices and including all three volumes of Lord of the Rings, secret shopping outings, dog walks including

the Christmas Eve special, indoor fireworks that set off the alarm, and outdoor ones that could set light to the shrubbery, brilliant holidays wearing his holiday hat and museum visits where he would make sure to read every bit of information on offer (usually out loud), trick-or-treating, Woodcraft camps and Reading festivals. The list is endless. The Knights were tight – and he was so proud of the fact that they still are. When he became ill, he loved that Ellie and Joe, with his partner, Honor, came home to share time with him, supporting us both through his gruelling treatment regime, finding time for fun and revisiting many happy memories.

I see him still, in Joe's commitment to the welfare of others and the way he puts family first, and in Eleanor's persistence in difficult circumstances this year as she successfully completed her PGCE and became a qualified teacher. He was so proud of you both and so committed to your future happiness. I know that you'll both miss him deeply but know that he always wanted to be there for you both. His support remains unconditional.

For me, Dad was my partner in life, he opened up my life to so many possibilities and introduced me to so many people and experiences, He always said, 'Yes!' to life and showed me how to do that too. He supported my studies, providing late night coffee and encouraging words whenever deadlines loomed and made my career choices possible by always talking through challenges and finding answers together. He wanted me to have a life as rich and fulfilling as the one he enjoyed, with independent enthusiasms and shared passions. He was, for us, the best husband, best dad, best friend.

We feel so lucky to have shared his life, to have experienced his unconditional love and support and to be able to stand together with all his family and friends, knowing that he will be part of our lives and held in our hearts for ever.